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THE DOVER PULPIT

DURING THE
REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

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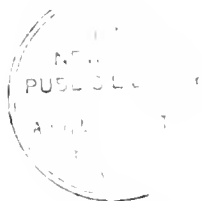
REV. JEREMY BELKNAP, D. D.,
TO THE CAUSE OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

PREACHED BY
REV. GEORGE B. SPALDING.

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DISCOURSE.

And with them were the prophets of God helping them.—Ezra 5 : 2.

The popular mind looks upon the historic page as a child looks at a painting. It is the few imposing forms standing in the foreground, which hold the exclusive gaze of each. Neither has an eye for perspective. They both fail to catch those more refined and really nobler figures upon which the Divine Wisdom or the artist's genius has most busied itself. It is the military hero, with his waving plume and his gleaming sword, who fills the eye and the imagination of both children and men, while the poet and the thinker, in their common garb, are left unnoticed. Where the page of history is one simply of military conquest, as where it records the triumph of Alexander over the Persians, of necessity the one shining figure is the great Grecian soldier, and the only study of the history of his period is the study of his campaigns and battles. So, too, to almost an equal degree, it may be said of that period in French history where Napoleon riveted upon himself the gaze of an affrighted world. It was a drama

through which one passion moved, and where one colossal form filled the stage. There was no perspective, no background of great principles, no sublime characters living and dying in the inspiration of spiritual truths and ideas, — none of these looming up even obscurely behind the scenes of smoke and slaughter. The history of France, and I might almost say the history of Europe, from 1796 to 1815, a period of about twenty years, is simply a history of Napoleon and his generals.

But there are other pages of history, which, though they too record the progress and result of battle and siege, and recount the exploits of generals and soldiers, yet must needs give their largest space to the more important narrative of the rise and movement of those great ideas and sentiments which are first sown by Heaven in the souls of prophets, scholars and thinkers, which then reach out to seize upon and influence the heart of a people, and finally find their issue and victory upon the field of battle.

This truth has its many illustrations, but there is none so brilliant and conspicuous as that found in the true history of the American War for Independence. “Lives of Washington and his Generals,” narratives of those seven years of heroic courage, vast suffering, and unconquerable faith, on the part of their half disciplined, starving, and almost always defeated armies. — these furnish us but a small part of the real material of that mighty epoch. On the great canvas, these hold the foreground, and first challenge the attention. They

are worthy to be had in everlasting remembrance. There is little danger of their ever failing of this. But to him who has any eye for perspective, there are other forms filling the spaces of the canvas beyond: scholars, orators, statesmen, seers, whose faces glow with even a purer light, in whose great thoughts and words had already been fought out the mighty victory which the sword did afterward only confirm. For the calm, dispassionate voice of history has declared, "The Revolution was an accomplished fact before the war commenced."

Behind the towering form of Washington; behind his noble *confreres*, Gates, Green, Knox, Schulyer, Stuben, Sullivan, Lee, Ward; behind those ranks of starved, bleeding, dying, but unconquerable soldiers, there rises an immortal group: the Adames, Hancock, Otis, Jefferson, Henry, Franklin, Robert Treat Paine, accomplished lawyers, sagacious statesmen, eloquent speakers. Before the insurrection of arms, there had been insurrection in the thoughts and words of these great civilians. Some of these men in way of philosophical treatise, others through legal argument, others still in fiery, irresistible appeal, had for years before open rebellion began, been pointing the people to the steady encroachments of England upon their liberties, and arousing them to the needed pitch of indignant protest, and at last deadly resistance.

But look again; gaze deeper into the receding canvas, and you will see behind these great political leaders, other forms, faces attenuated to a higher spir-

ituality, to a finer scholarship, and to a more sacred passion. Before Adams or Hancock, or Franklin or Jefferson had uttered their denunciations of British tyranny, before even the possibility of resistance to arbitrary power had been thought of by them, before they had even dreamed of independence and of a union of the colonies in a great nationality,—these men, in the inspiration of a gospel which is that of liberty, had been laying bare the falsity of royal assumptions, expounding the principles of good government and of manhood in the state, and schooling legislators, judges and people to an understanding of those civil rights which are the offspring of religious freedom,—and, as events thickened, in advance of all others, they were ever narrowing the issue between the colonies and the home government, concentrating more and more the aroused indignation of an oppressed people into the idea of resistance, and pointing out to the sagacious statesmen of the day the principles and method of a vital union and co-operation among the provinces. Who are these men who hold the background in the picture, whose very obscurity serves to make more prominent these others. They were Congregational ministers!

The principles of our civil liberty and of our national independence, which forty millions of people in these days are celebrating, did not find their first utterance in the great Declaration. They did not spring to life in the debates of the Provincial Congress. They did not originate in the elaborate papers of Adams and

Jefferson. They did not leap forth to their first light in the impassioned eloquence of James Otis, or the vehement appeal of Patrick Henry. They had their birth in the Election Sermons, in the Fast and Thanksgiving Discourses of the Congregation : ministers of New England.

When and where did the American Revolution begin? The question can be variously answered. The children in the schools have been taught to say, "At Lexington, April 19, 1775."

But the question has been better answered by John Adams, who, speaking of the argument of James Otis, delivered in 1761, in the old Town-house of Boston now the old State-house, against the Writs of Assistance, exclaimed, "James Otis breathed into this nation the breath of life. Then and there the child Independence was born. In fifteen years, i. e., in 1776, it grew up to manhood and declared itself free." But a better and a truer answer awaits us. Robert Treat Paine, the great lawyer and statesman, one of the signers of the Declaration, called Dr. Jonathan Mayhew "The Father of civil and religious liberty in Massachusetts and America." Twenty-five years before those guns were fired in the streets of Lexington, eleven years before Otis launched the bolts of his fiery argument at the Royal Court in Boston,—eleven years before this, the young preacher, just then in his thirtieth year, from his pulpit of the West church, in that city, preached a sermon which a historian has called, "The Morning Gun of the Revolution." It was a ser-

mon concerning which the elder Adams said, "It was read by everybody, celebrated by friends, and abused by enemies. It was seasoned with wit and satire superior to any in Swift or Franklin."

I have read through this famous discourse, and have been astonished not only at the grand sweep of its argument, but especially at the fearlessness of its entire spirit. The preacher says: "When once magistrates act contrary to their office and the end of their institution,—when they rob and ruin the public, instead of being guardians of its peace and welfare,—they immediately cease to be the ordinance and ministers of God, and no more deserve that glorious character than common pirates and highwaymen." This certainly was a sharp arrow in the side of the King's defenders, who so stoutly affirmed that "The King can do no wrong," and that "Submission, clear, absolute, and without exception, is the duty of the subject." But the preacher went on to assert another duty of the subject than this. "A people," he says, "really oppressed in a great degree by their sovereign, can not well be insensible when they are so oppressed; and such a people,—if I may allude to an ancient fable,—have, like the Hesperian fruit, a dragon for their protector and guardian. Nor would they have any reason to mourn if some Hercules should appear to dispatch him. For a nation thus to arise unanimously and resist their prince, even to the dethroning him, is not criminal, but a reasonable way of vindicating their liberties and just rights. It is making use of the means, and the only means which

God has put into their power for mutual and self-defense. And it would be highly criminal in them not to make use of this means. It would be stupid tameness and unaccountable folly for whole nations to suffer *one* unreasonable, ambitious and cruel man, to wanton and riot in their misery. And in such a case it would, of the two, be more rational to suppose that they that did not resist, than that they who did, would receive to themselves damnation."

Here was a lesson set for the men and the boys to learn. How well they learned it, may be seen in the words of John Adams, twenty-five years afterward, when he exclaimed in 1775. "We are not exciting rebellion. Opposition, nay, open, avowed resistance by arms against usurpation and lawless violence, is not rebellion by the law of God or the land."

"To draw the character of Mayhew," writes Adams, "would be to transcribe a dozen volumes." "This transcendent genius," he adds, "threw all the weight of his great fame into the scale of his country from the first, and maintained it there with zeal and ardor to his death." It was this Congregational minister who suggested to James Otis the idea of committees of correspondence, a measure of greatest efficiency in producing concert of action between the colonies, a thing of vital importance. Thus he writes to Otis, in June, 1766, "You have heard of the *communion of churches*, and I am to set out to-morrow morning for Rutland, to assist at an ecclesiastical council. Not expecting to return this week, while I was thinking of this in my bed,

the great use and importance of a *communion of colonies* appeared to me in a strong light; which has led me immediately to set down these hints to transmit to you."

I speak at this stage of my discourse with such special emphasis of Mayhew, because he was first in order of time of these evangelists of American liberty. Later on, and yet some of them preceding the great political leaders of the Revolution, were Dr. Chauncy, pastor of the first church in Boston, who, with the calmness and precision of the statesman, discussed in his Thanksgiving sermon, in 1766, the dangers in which the Stamp Act involved both English and American liberty; and Samuel Cook, of the second church in Cambridge, who, in an election sermon preached in 1770, before Thomas Hutchinson, Esq., Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief, and the Honorables, His Majesty's Council, protested in calm but unmistakable language against the increasing despotism of British rule, suggesting precedents for curing present ills in the body politic, if quieter remedies, such as petitions and remonstrances proved to be insufficient; and William Gordon, of the third church in Roxbury, the pastor and friend of Hancock, whose impetuous patriotism pouring into his great sermon of Dec. 15, 1774, fired that statesman's cooler blood; and Dr. Langdon, formerly of Portsmouth, but President of Harvard College when he preached his stirring election sermon at Watertown before the Congress of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, just previous to the battle at Bunker Hill, and

West, and Payson, and Howard, and President Stiles, and the Baptists Stillman and Manning. It was these men and others of like religious faith with them, *Congregational ministers*, who were among the very foremost in the cause of American independence, discussing with the sagacity of disciplined statesmen, and the fervor of liberty loving Christians the true principles of government, and the mutual relations between the citizen and the state, protesting against the first and every successive step of England's invasion of personal right and liberty, arousing the apathetic, rebuking the corrupt, intensifying the zeal of the most ardent, furnishing in their sermons the material of thought and the very language which afterwards were wrought into the states-papers of Adams, and the immortal Declaration of Jefferson, and presenting in their ecclesiastical polity, in the democratic form of their church meeting, the very plan upon which Jefferson, as he himself affirmed, modeled his entire idea of a republican government

The truth is, the seed of our great republic was brought over in the Mayflower. As the keen student of American history, De Tocqueville, declared, "The Puritans brought with them to the New World a form of Christianity, which I can not better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion. This contributed powerfully to the establishment of a republic and a democracy in public affairs." The church was a seminary of liberty. Civil liberty was born of religious liberty.

Among the preachers of the Revolutionary period, this ancient church furnished one whose patriotism, whose faith, whose abilities, whose services in the cause of liberty were surpassed by none of these eminent ones whom I have named. His ministry here, which continued for nearly twenty years, covered the entire time of the war. The sermons which he here preached, the letters which he here wrote to the distinguished men of his times, the communications which he here prepared for the newspapers in various places, relating to the great question which was agitating all hearts, were very numerous. Many of them have been preserved, just as they were originally written, and are counted among the very chief treasures of the Massachusetts Historical Society.* Dr. Franklin, in speaking of Dr. Belknap and his services to the cause of American Independence, declared that no one had done more for that cause than he, and no one deserves a higher tribute of praise from those who are enjoying its blessings.

The first utterance which I find from Dr. Belknap, bearing upon the subject which was beginning to enlist the thoughts of our fathers, occurs in a sermon which he preached Nov. 10, 1772, before His Majesty's Governor, John Wentworth, Esq., at a review of the Second Regiment of Foot here in Dover. New Hampshire had been inured to military service through its long period

* I would acknowledge the courtesy extended to me by the officers of this Society, in affording me free access to the papers of Dr. Belknap.

of war with the Indians. An old law required every male inhabitant from sixteen to sixty years of age, to own a musket, bayonet, knapsack, cartridge box, one pound of powder, twenty bullets and twelve flints. This militia was organized into companies and regiments, and subject to frequent drills. The muster day, and the review was a great occasion. Dover was a center of this military stir. At this gathering here in Nov., 1772, the Royal Governor, John Wentworth, came up from Portsmouth. Capt. Waldron, a member of this church, and a staunch friend of his pastor, had invited Dr. Belknap to preach to the troops. The subject chosen by the preacher was "Military Duty." In the course of the sermon he spoke as follows, on the necessity of self-defense :

Has the All-wise and merciful Parent of the universe furnished the brute and reptile creation with the necessary instruments of defense, and does the instinct which he has implanted in them prompt them to make use of these weapons for their own subsistence and security; and has He not implanted in mankind a natural courage or martial spirit and given them skill and power to provide themselves with all the necessary instruments of defense, and can it be supposed that we must make no use of these gifts of Nature, even when Providence points out the necessity? Do we guard our fields from devouring beasts, our houses and bodies from the rigors of the weather, and shall we not have the privilege of defending our lives, our liberties, our property, our families, our civil government, from hostile invaders? Must we tamely yield to every lawless usurper and suffer tyrants to sport with the lives and estates of mankind? Must all these laws which the wisdom and experience of ages have founded, must the sacred bonds of society, the peace, the welfare, the happiness of man-

kind, be sacrificed to the impetuous rage of a foreign conqueror? Forbid it, reason and conscience; forbid it, ye heroic worthies of old, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of liars, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

The Officers of the Second Regiment of Foot were so pleased with this Address that they asked a copy for the press. I fail to find anywhere that His Majesty's Governor joined in this request.

In the following year, Dr. Belknap, in a letter to a dissenting clergyman in London, wrote thus :

The paper on which I write is the manufacture of this country, where many valuable arts and manufactures unknown, till of late, are now gaining ground, and yield a pleasant prospect of our future wealth and greatness. If the present despotic system formed on your side of the water is continued, we expect to see our sea-port towns diminished; but our inland territories will be vastly improved, and a foundation laid for a considerable empire in time to come. Your ministry and parliament are undesignedly taking the most direct steps to accomplish this end. * * * The tyranny formerly established in Great Britain drove our forefathers hither, and began the settlement of this valuable country. Wiser princes, who succeeded, reaped the benefit thereof, in the commerce, bravery, and affection of this people. The tyranny now establishing will, while it subsists, hinder our being serviceable to the British Kingdom, but will cause such a vast increase of power as will make future monarchs esteem American loyalty the brightest jewel in their crown.

The year 1774 was a memorable one in the history of these provinces. England, under the irresistible pressure of opposition which her attempts to force a revenue from these colonies had produced not only

here in America, but in England herself on the part of some of her ablest statesmen, had repealed the Stamp Act, and yet the repeal was followed by another act declaring that Parliament had a right "to bind the colonies in all cases whatsoever." Later still she had repealed the act imposing duties on certain articles, but an exception was made in the article of tea. Lord North in this second surrender which he made to the "rebel spirit" of America said, "A total repeal can not be thought of till America is prostrate at our feet." He wanted to save the principle, that is the right of the home government to bind the colonies, but it was the principle that our fathers were alone concerned about. It was this naked abstract matter of right, that they were most bent on denying. And so, on the arrival of the tea, they seized it by force and scattered it over Boston harbor. This was followed by the act of Parliament closing the port of Boston. The law was to take effect June 1, 1774. Then began to be put into operation those Letters of Correspondence, that first idea of union which Parson Mayhew, eight years before, had suggested to James Otis. The General Assembly of New Hampshire was in session in May, this year, 1774. Conformably to the proceedings of the Assemblies of other colonies, the Representatives in this Province appointed a Committee of Correspondence. Governor Wentworth interfered. He adjourned the Assembly. The members met again. The Governor with a sheriff came among them. He declared their meeting illegal. The sheriff made procla-

mation for all persons to disperse and keep the King's peace. The members met again, and determined to send letters to all the towns and parishes in the Province, requesting them to send Deputies to a convention at Exeter, who should choose delegates to a General Congress to meet at Philadelphia. This was the first movement for rallying the whole of the people of New Hampshire in the great contest. Attached to this most important letter to the several towns was this brief proclamation: "Considering the Distressing situation of our public affairs, Thursday, the 14th inst., is recommended to be kept as a day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, through this Province."

The day was observed here in Dover with special religious solemnity. On that occasion, July 14, 1774, Dr. Belknap preached a sermon which bears this title: "*On Account of the Difficulties of the King.*" The text was from 1 Sam. 8: 18,—“And ye shall cry out in that day because of your King which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.” A most pertinent text! In this sermon he says:

It is, my brethren, a very dark day to these American colonies. Burdens and taxes are laid upon us by the Parliament of Great Britain, and the most forcible attempts are made to bring us to a submission, and what further is intended we know not, but we have reason to fear much, considering how highly they are incensed against us, and what power they have to carry their determination into execution. * * * When a ruler departs from these principles and sets up any other rule of government than the Laws and Constitution which he is sworn to maintain, then the government degenerates into tyranny.

Perhaps the most remarkable passage in this noble sermon is the following :

Would it not be astonishing to hear that a people who are contending so earnestly for liberty, are not willing to allow liberty to others? Is it not astonishing to think that there are at this day, in the several colonies upon this continent, some thousands of men, women and children, detained in bondage and slavery for no other crime than that their skin is of a darker color than our own? Such is the inconsistency of our conduct! As we have made them slaves without their consent and without any crime, so it is just in God to permit other men to make slaves of us.

Here was a man, who from this Dover pulpit, one hundred and three years ago, anticipated not only the Declaration of Independence, but the greater Emancipation Proclamation of our own day!

One thing is very noticeable in this arraignment of British despotism. The solemn impeachment is not of the King, but of his Ministry and Parliament. And this is characteristic of all the papers which were at first issued against the arbitrary measures of the home government. Dr. George E. Elliot, of Boston, has recently called attention to the fact that during the ten first years of the great controversy, there was in all the written papers of the American patriots a "studious avoidance of any utterance or statement that could be personally offensive to the King. The whole blame and censure were laid at the door of the ministers and Parliament, as prompting and goading the King to turn away from our humble remonstrances and petitions, and to harden his heart and hand against us."

I find that Dr. Belknap, in the very next year, after hostilities had commenced, even while he was acting as chaplain to the revolutionary troops in camp at Cambridge, remembered the King of England with due affection in his prayers. With what tremendous suddenness and volume the tide of feeling turned against His Majesty, is seen in the famous Declaration of 1776. Then and there, as Dr. Ellis has pointed out, the long indictment drawn with such labored severity of language was from first to last against the King alone. In the paper as first penned and presented by Jefferson, the British people was joined to the King in the crimes and outrages committed against these colonies. Congress promptly struck out that portion relating to the people of England, leaving the whole fearful weight of reproach and invective to fall upon the King, and the King only. Perhaps the best reason which Dr. Ellis gives for this remarkable change in the tone and temper of both state papers and sermons is, that it became evident to all that a time had come when a great and decisive step must be taken, when the breach between the colonies and the home government should be made final and irreparable, when a line should be clearly drawn between Patriots and Tories all over the American Continent. After the Declaration was made, Dr. Belknap no more prayed for the King.

While the New Hampshire Convention was in session at Exeter, appointing delegates to attend the coming Congress at Philadelphia, a correspondence from the Committee of Massachusetts was received, setting

forth the destitute condition of the people of Boston under the execution of the law shutting up its port. The act was characterized by the clerk, Samuel Adams, "as designed to suppress the spirit of liberty in America." The New Hampshire Convention recommended to the respective towns, "to liberally contribute towards the Relief of the Poor of the Town of Boston."

On Nov. 6, 1774, Dr. Belknap preached a sermon "*On Commiserating.*" The text was from Heb. 13: 3: "Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

Coming to the subject before him, Dr. Belknap said:

The case of the people of Boston is extremely singular, nothing like it having ever, so far as I can learn, been known since the first settlement of America. That town and that Province of which it is the capital, have always been among the foremost in vindicating the liberty of this country from the encroachments of arbitrary power. By which means they have exposed themselves to the fiercest resentment of those who have assumed the power of disposing of our property at their pleasure. It is not any private quarrel in which they have become engaged, and in which they are now suffering. It is a cause common to this whole continent, a cause which, if once given up, we and our posterity must be miserable.

The grand question to be decided is not whether we are to submit to the powers which are in being, and which God has placed over us, but *where* that power is,—for if the question be once determined where the supreme power lies, then we know, according to the Gospel, if obedience be due. The controversy is whether that supreme power is in the King and Parliament of Great Britain enacting laws without the consent of those who are to be governed by them, or whether we ourselves ought to have a share of the legislative authority to which we are to submit. The King and Parliament have determined that

they have a Right to make laws binding upon us in all cases whatsoever, and this whole continent in their respective assemblies have expressly denied that Right, and each side seem determined to stand by their Resolutions. On the one hand, they have sent a large and formidable force to terrify us into submission. They have shut up one of the finest ports in America, and thereby reduced twenty thousand people to a state of suffering, because they have been foremost in asserting the Right and Privilege of the whole continent; and on the other hand, shall we not determine to stand by our suffering brethren, and lend them all the aid we can to support them through the struggle? How long the struggle will last, or how it will end, we can not foresee. The cause is too sacred to be deserted in this time of extremity, and if, by contributing a small part of our substance, we should prevent the miseries of slavery from being the lot of our posterity, who would not be willing to do this? who can hesitate one moment whether to choose the blessings of liberty or the horrors of tyranny for himself and his children? This I take it, my brethren, is the point before you, and I doubt not that you will all agree.

There is not a true American who wishes not well to the noble cause in which we are engaged, and it is a great pity that any difference of opinion about smaller matters which may arise in the course of this controversy should divert us from pursuing this great object, to secure and preserve the Rights which our forefathers labored and bled to obtain and transmit to us.

Viewing the matter in this light, which I humbly apprehend is just and true, you are not to look upon what you give on this occasion as a bounty to the town of Boston, but as contributing to lay a foundation for the liberty and prosperity of this country. It is so much given to your children. It is to secure to yourselves an inheritance far more valuable than any estates which you can get for yourselves and leave to them. For what will it signify to leave them in possession of that which another has power to take from them at pleasure? If you are to give them anything for their own, this is the time to secure it for them. This is the way to make them as free as you would wish yourselves to be. Do this, and they will bless your memory for it to the latest generation.

On the 19th of April, 1775, the controversy of ideas closed; the war of arms began. The fire of British guns glared over all the colonies, and every soul beneath these skies knew that the die was cast. With a courage that seemed like madness, with a faith in God that a corrupt age would call fanaticism, the feeble, dis-severed colonies accepted the gage which the mightiest kingdom of earth cast down before them.

The tidings of the battle of Lexington reached Belknap at Dover Point as he was on his way home from Portsmouth. He sent from the Point the following note to his wife.

Before you receive this, you will hear the awful news by the Express I met just now at the ferry, of the devastation the troops have made at Concord, and the commencement of a Civil War, which makes it absolutely necessary that I should proceed immediately to Boston, if it is not in ashes before I get there. I shall try and get a chaise at Greenland. As necessity has no law, the people must excuse my absence next Sabbath, if I should not return before it.

He arrived at Cambridge in due time, and found himself "among ten thousand armed men who had gathered from every quarter," to take part in the next battle. From there he writes to his wife in Dover: "Don't let my gun and munition get out of the house if you can help it." The brave parson knew his gun well. I found among his papers a very precise description of it. He doubtless thought it most probable that he should be called to fight, in which case no "carnal weapon" could have served him better.

While at Cambridge, he preached in the morning in

the street, and in the afternoon in the meeting-house to the Provincial Army there assembled. He soon returned home with his parents.

Dover for the next few months was astir with military preparations. There was a company at once enlisted here by Capt. Benj. Titcomb. On the 14th of June, three days before fire opened on Bunker Hill, Dr. Belknap preached to these soldiers, on the *Nature of True Courage*. He said :

It is a very fashionable doctrine, especially among the British troops, that the soldier has nothing to do with the conscience of war, or to enquire whether it be just or not. He has only to obey orders. If soldiers had no consciences, if they were horses instead of men, this doctrine might be propagated with the utmost safety. But, my brethren, you are reasonable creatures. You are accountable to a higher tribunal than any earthly power, and you have a right to examine and it is your duty to examine whether the cause in which you are engaged is just, and if you find that it is so, you can fight with a good conscience, and with a hope in the Divine Providence for liberty and success. Let then every man behave himself in his proper station according to the duty required of him, and serve his country to the utmost of his power.

Four days after, news having been received that a battle had commenced at Charlestown, this company, under Capt. Titcomb, marched to the scene of battle.

The 22d day of this month of June, 1775, was observed throughout the colonies as a day of Fasting and Prayer, at the recommendation of the Provincial Congress. It was a day of more than usual solemnity. The battle at Bunker Hill, with all that there was in the bravery of our troops as exhibited there, to stir

the blood of every patriot, brought to every home in America an awful sense of the horrors of war. Dr. Belknap felt the solemnity of the occasion, but his heart was strong and his faith high. He came into this pulpit on the morning of the 22d, while yet the smoke wreathed the not distant battle-field, and messengers were riding through these streets with orders for hastening onward men and supplies,—he came here with no note of lamentation, but with one of lofty cheer. “Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.” That was his text. I will give you the keynote of that discourse. Said he :

The case has come to this extremity, that we either shall be reduced to slavery and ruin, or nobly exert ourselves in defense of our dearest rights and liberties and be forevermore free. Who that has any feelings of a man can hesitate one moment as to what to do? Who can doubt that it is his duty to defend, to the utmost of his power, this mighty country and all in it that is dear to us against this hostile invasion of arbitrary power. We strike for the liberties not of ourselves alone, but for the liberties of Englishmen everywhere. * * * * They at home are as much in danger as we here. Their liberty is as much in peril as ours. If the experiment made here against freedom succeeds, it will soon be practiced upon them. * * * The interests of Britain and her colonies are so inseparably connected that they stand or fall together.

How clearly now is this mighty truth seen by every true son of England. In the British Parliament Pitt had declared the controversy in America to be a great common cause, and that “America, if she fell, would fall like a strong man. She would embrace the pillars of the state, and pull down the constitution along

with her." And after this, when the war had ceased, General Burgoyne, in the House of Commons affirmed that he was now convinced "the principle of the American war was wrong, * * only one part of a system leveled against the Constitution and the general rights of mankind."

Dr. Belknap was chosen by the Committee of Safety of New Hampshire, Chaplain to their troops at Cambridge. His duties here prevented him from accepting this office, and yet we find that in his frequent visits to the camps around Boston he many times preached to the soldiers.

His sermons through the whole period of the war, and far on until the settlement of the form of the state and national government, were numerous. They are still in existence, making a great mass of finely written manuscript. They embraced in their discussion all the more important questions which engaged the statesmanship as well as the military science of the times. He saw as clearly, as we in this period have been made to see, the fatal consequences which follow when a people proposes to pay its debts with promises. In a Fast Day sermon preached April 22d, 1778, he emphasized among the perils which threatened the country its false and destructive system of finance. He painted in true colors "the depreciating nature of paper currency," "an evil," he declared, "which this country has been plagued with in both former and later times." He saw, as we have seen, how in this limitless supply of manufactured money, great wealth would flow into the treas-

ury of a few, but its worthlessness would soon even these be made manifest. "Some," said the preacher, "are growing rich. But such riches will prove a curse and not a blessing." And then he uttered a warning which it would be well, if every financial trickster of our day might hear: "He that thrives upon the ruin of his country is as great an enemy to it as he that takes up arms against it!"

What a profound Christian philosophy is shown in a sermon preached at the close of the war!

God was pleased to bring our enemies upon us, who began by their impositions on our trade, and restrictions on our liberty; then openly invaded our country, killed our people, pillaged and burnt our houses, and spread havoc and destruction with a cruel and relentless hand; thus obliging us to arm ourselves, to learn the art of war, to open new sources of supply, to seek foreign aid, to form new confederacies among ourselves, and in short, to effect a complete revolution—in the doing of which we have put every nerve to the stretch and have suffered all the sorrows and hardships of war. By such severe disciplines God has been teaching us the value of these liberties and possessions which He has given us. We have or ought to have learned by this time how dearly to prize them.

But already I have quoted enough to give you a true idea of the character of this man of God. In all the stress and trial of that awful period, when defeat followed defeat, when our armies were scattered, starved and frozen; in times of hope, when friends were hastening to our relief, and victory perched upon our banners; in times when war had ceased, but when perils of a not less momentous nature hung around the not yet delivered nation,

this prophet of our Israel, this lion-hearted patriot, this lover of mankind, this unflinching believer in God, stood through all the years on this spot where now I stand, encouraging the brave, rebuking the cowardly, rallying once more, and once more, and yet again to the very end, the fathers and sons of freedom, mingling with all his stirring appeals, exhortations for purity of life, fear of God, and faith in the right, and giving forth counsels and advice touching every point of state affairs which, to a much greater extent than many are aware of, helped to guide this New Hampshire province through its thousand perplexities, and molded both state and nation into their enduring form.

This ancient town in its centuries of history, has had men of distinguished merit, men of heroic courage, of lofty virtue and unalloyed patriotism. This venerable church, in its long line of prophets, has had men of unblemished Christian character, of great spiritual boldness and faith and prevailing prayer, men of persuasive speech, large understanding and fruitful service; but who is there among the dead or the living who will challenge the meed of praise which I give to JEREMY BELKNAP, our Revolutionary Preacher, as leading in all this host of the good and great, himself crowned with a superior excellence?

And now, fellow citizens, what better tribute, after the loftiest eulogies have broken from our lips, and the warmest gratitude has brimmed our hearts,—what better tribute can we pay to this man and the cause he loved, and the cause we all love, than to imitate the pure

and true patriotism which beat in every pulse of his life?

I catch his words attuned to the same deep, sweet rhythm of Christian love for his country, when years after, having left Dover, he preached upon national affairs from his pulpit in the old Federal Street Church of Boston. May the lofty prayer of his concluding appeal be answered in us and our children. "May we," he said, "conduct ourselves as a people who prove themselves worthy of such a history. May America rise in her importance to be a resplendent example to the world, that the liberty and prosperity of a nation are best promoted by the cultivation of public and private virtue, by a diffusion of useful knowledge, by gratitude to benefactors, and by a humble and devout acknowledgement of Him, who ruleth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.'"

APPENDIX.

A hundred years ago, DR. BELKNAP preached a patriotic sermon on this spot. On that occasion he read Psalms 34, 35, 81, 82, 83. And the people sang as follows :

PSALM 77. *Second Part.* Common Metre.

Comfort derived from ancient providences ; or Israel delivered from Egypt, and brought to Canaan.

“ How awful is thy chastening rod ! ”
(May thy own children say)
“ The great, the wise, the dreadful God,
How holy is his way ! ”

I'll meditate his works of old ;
The King that reigns above ;
I'll hear his ancient wonders told,
And learn to trust his love.

Long did the house of Joseph lie
With Egypt's yoke oppress'd ;
Long he delayed to hear their cry,
Nor gave his people rest.

The sons of good old Jacob seem'd
Abandon'd to their foes ;

But his almighty arm redem'd
The nation that he chose.

Israel, his people and his sheep,
Must follow where he calls ;
He bids them venture through the deep,
And makes the waves their walls.

The waters saw thee, mighty God !
The waters saw thee come ;
Backward they fled, and frighted stood,
To make thine armies room.

Strange was thy journey through the sea,
Thy footsteps, Lord, unknown ;
Terrors attend thy wondrous way,
And bring thy mercies down.

PSALM 76. Common Metre.

*Israel saved, and the Assyrians destroyed ; or, God's vengeance
against his enemies proceeds from his church.*

In Judah God of old was known ;
His name in Israel great ;
In Salem stood his holy throne,
And Zion was his seat.

Among the praises of his saints,
His dwelling there he chose ;
There he receiv'd the just complaints,
Against their haughty foes.

From Zion went his dreadful word,
And broke the threatening spear ;
The bow, the arrows, and the sword,
And crushed the Assyrian war.

What are the earth's wide kingdoms else,
 But mighty hills of prey?
 The hill on which Jehovah dwells
 Is glorious more than they.

'Twas Zion's King that stopp'd the breath
 Of captains and their hands;
 The men of might slept fast in death,
 And never found their hands.

At thy rebuke O, Jacob's God,
 Both horse and chariot fell;
 Who knows the terrors of thy rod?
 Thy vengeance who can tell?

What power can stand before thy sight,
 When once thy wrath appears?
 When heaven shines round with dreadful light,
 The earth lies still and fears.

When God in his own sovereign ways
 Comes down to save th' opprest.
 The wrath of man shall work his praise,
 And he'll restrain the rest.

PSALM 74. Common Metre.

The church pleading with God under sore persecution.

What strange deliverance hast thou shown
 In ages long before?
 And now no other God we own,
 No other God adore.

Thou didst divide the raging sea
 By thy resistless might.

To make thy tribes a wondrous way,
And then secure their flight.

Is not the world of nature thine,
The darkness and the day?
Didst thou not bid the morning shine,
And mark the sun his way?

Hath not thy power form'd every coast,
And set the earth its bounds,
With summer's heat, and winter's frost,
In their perpetual rounds?

And shall the sons of earth and dust
That sacred power blaspheme?
Will not thine hand, that form'd them first,
Avenge thine injured name?

Think on the covenant thou hast made,
And all thy words of love;
Nor let the birds of prey invade,
And vex thy mourning dove.

Our foes would triumph in our blood,
And make our hope their jest,
Plead thy own cause, Almighty God,
And give thy children rest.

SM

